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SUBJECT: TURKEY: ADANA MAYOR'S RACE BREAKS WIDE OPEN AS INCUMBENT  
ABRUPTLY RESIGNS FROM AK PARTY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The sudden resignation of Adana's four-term mayor Aytac Durak from AKP may present an insurmountable challenge to the party's chance to retake Adana in upcoming municipal elections. Outside theories abound on reasons for Durak's renunciation of AKP membership including a spurned Durak, a generally souring relationship and AKP's fear of being linked to charges of corruption that have resurfaced in the mayor's office. Ever-popular Durak now faces the difficult dilemma of where to hitch his political wagon - to go with a small, politically insignificant party or run as an independent. In the end, for voters it will come down to party loyalty verses candidate loyalty. END SUMMARY.

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ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL - AND PERSONAL  
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12. (SBU) Over the weekend of November 29, Adana's politically savvy Mayor Aytac Durak, abruptly quit the ruling AK Party (Justice and Development Party) on whose ticket he ran in 2004. Durak is the longest serving big-city mayor in Turkey; prior to AKP, he ran under the banner of the DYP (True Path Party) as well as ANAP (Motherland Party). His move comes weeks in advance of political parties' announcement of their candidates for the March 2009 local elections, and may jeopardize AKP's chances of reclaiming the greater Adana municipality as Durak tops the charts in Adana for name recognition and is a proven favorite among voters. In a televised press conference, a feisty and indignant Durak explained it was insulting to the people of Adana, 75% of whom had expressed in a recent poll (conducted by his own office) overwhelming support for his reelection, that AKP would still insist on holding a local caucus to select the party's mayoral candidate. Durak said it was "utterly impossible" for him to accept this, and he was giving notice in order to stand in solidarity with his constituents.

13. (SBU) Durak's political ambitions are clear: he will run again, but the question is whether he remains independent or hitches his star to another political wagon. Durak himself discussed with us the pros and cons of running as an independent (more respect from voters, but little political clout in Ankara and his hangers-on would be bereft of a political future once he leaves office); and running on the ticket of a small party (less respect, some political cover, but party affiliates would be forever seeking favors.) He admitted that his latest poll results may not be valid, given respondents answered under the

assumption he would run on the AKP ticket, but remained confident that voter loyalty to his personal candidacy would trump AKP party allegiance. On the subject of his fallout with AKP, he acknowledged things could have been different if AKP had nominated him early on.

14. (SBU) Durak's political longevity and peerless self-promotion skills ensure he's always in the media (especially on his son's private TV station) and a regular subject of dinner-table talk. Local business leader Mustafa Gulek believes rumors of Durak's corruption turned the AKP leadership against him. Acar Filiz, a broadcasting director for a local television station, believes Durak has been on the outs with AKP for several months, and skillfully timed his piqued resignation just hours before AKP Provincial Party leader Mustafa Attaroglu announced his own plans to run for mayor.

15. (SBU) Within AKP there will now be a struggle to be named as the candidate. While many are focused on Attaroglu, Gultekin Genc, deputy mayor of Adana's affluent Seyhan district, thinks his boss, Mayor Azim Ozturk, will be PM Tayyip Erdogan's pick for the greater municipality, and will successfully topple Durak. Genc guesses the politically green Attaroglu will take the Seyhan slot.

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COMMENT  
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16. (SBU) Party affiliation is unimportant for Durak, who has thrived as the parties he ran with have waxed and waned. An entire generation of Adana voters knows of no other candidate besides the 70-year-old charismatic populist. Durak will certainly play the populist card to portray AKP as out-of-touch with the hearts and minds of Adana's citizens, but the AKP machine will give the mayor a serious challenge as the party is well organized and generous in distributing coal and food to needy families. AKP's candidate choice will also be important. While Ozturk has the party credentials and administrative experience to challenge Durak, Attaroglu is straight out of central casting for a political hot-shot - a tall, handsome, smooth operator whose former military officer credentials and head-scarved wife cover both sides of the political fence. Adana will be in for an exciting election season.  
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